

NICARAGUAN EXILES SEE CONTRAS DIVIDED, U.S. DOMINATED
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WASHINGTON

A U.S.-sponsored Nicaraguan rebel unity group _ central to President Reagan's plan to resume military aid to the insurgents _ has failed to heal the deep divisions that have plagued the war against that nation's leftist government, prominent Nicaraguan exiles say.

Many of the exiles, longtime opponents of Nicaragua's Sandinista government, also expressed doubt that even renewed American military aid can avert the rebels' ultimate defeat as long as the movement is run by leaders the exiles contend are hand-picked by the U.S. government.

Several added that the only realistic hope now for ousting the Sandinista government is direct U.S. military intervention to crush the Soviet-supplied Nicaraguan army _ an option the Reagan administration has repeatedly rejected.

The grim assessment by leading Nicaraguans in Miami, Washington and California comes as Reagan prepares to ask Congress for as much as \$100 million in military and non-lethal aid for the Contra rebels _ a proposal expected to reignite bitter debate over Central America.

Administration and congressional officials say the success of Reagan's expected request hinges on persuading moderate House members that the United Nicaraguan Opposition, UNO, the rebels' principal umbrella group, poses a unified and effective democratic alternative to the Sandinistas.

"UNO will have to show that it is the legitimate political leader of the Contras, that it controls the military and has a platform for a democratic society for Nicaragua," Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman, said Wednesday.

But Nicaraguan exiles, interviewed by The Associated Press, questioned UNO's success in unifying and controlling rebel ranks after it was created at the administration's urging last June. The AP interviewed 22 anti-Sandinista Nicaraguan exiles about their views on the political and military situation.

"UNO is designed to do battle in Congress, not to do battle in the front lines, with the people of Nicaragua," said Silvio Arguello-Cardenal, a former Nicaraguan vice president, now living in Miami. "It owes its existence... exclusively to... U.S. intelligence agencies that provide it direction and exercise strict every-day control over its military operations and political pronouncements."

Jose Medina Cuadra, a Nicaraguan attorney living in Miami, said he resigned from UNO because "the group was set up to function on paper, but not in action." He said the group "hasn't done anything either for those fighting in Nicaragua or those in exile."

Even with a massive infusion of U.S. military aid, the rebels "can never overthrow the Sandinistas on their own," Medina said. He said he would support direct U.S. intervention in Nicaragua "because the Soviets and the Cubans have already intervened and control Nicaragua."

Conservative exiles sharply criticized the inclusion of former Sandinista officials, Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo, in the triumvirate that runs UNO. They hold Cruz and Robelo responsible for the Sandinistas' confiscation of their property and they contend the U.S. attempt to broaden the rebel movement by including them has deepened divisions.

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The third UNO leader is Adolfo Calero, head of the CIA -organized Nicaraguan Democratic Force, FDN, the largest rebel army. But his presence, too, has been divisive, with rival rebel factions charging that UNO's management of \$27 million in non-lethal U.S. aid mostly food, medicine and clothing is intended to subjugate them under the conservative FDN.

Former Sandinista hero Eden Pastora, who now leads the Costa Rican-based Contra organization, Revolutionary Democratic Alliance, ARDE, this week said rebel unity is vital to the struggle but must be "carried out in an atmosphere of equality and not submission."

Armstrong Wiggins, a spokesman for an Indian contra group, Misurasata, said UNO has used the U.S. logistical aid to divide Indian organizations and lure Indian fighters into the FDN at the expense of other groups.

Misura rebel Indian leader Steadman Fagoth described UNO as "a new political arm of the FDN" that has failed to create the unity needed to enhance the rebels' international standing. He said the lack of unity "has demoralized the troops in the field. They are losing confidence in their leaders' ability to form a united front against the common enemy."

But behind the criticism of UNO is the recurring theme that Americans, not Nicaraguans, control and direct the anti-Sandinista war, even after Congress cut off CIA military aid to the rebels in 1984.

"The revolution is out of the hands of Nicaraguans _ the movement is in the hands of foreign forces," said Salvador Icaza, a former Contra commander, now living in the United States. He said rebel leaders do not "represent the aspirations of Nicaraguans _ they represent the U.S. interest."

Bernardino Larios Montiel, a former Nicaraguan military official jailed by both the rightist Somoza dictatorship and the leftist Sandinista government, complained that more U.S. aid will likely lead only to more American control.

"I would rather we maintained some of our dignity, and not accept any more ... American aid," said Larios, who now lives in Miami and recently resigned from an UNO advisory commission.

But several saw U.S. military aid and a broader-based rebel movement as essential to defeat the Sandinistas, and grudgingly accepted Cruz and Robelo as the price for that assistance.

"If that's what some people in the U.S. government feel that we have to do, then that's what you have to do," said Eduardo Montealegre, a former leading Nicaraguan banker now living in Miami.

"I accept it only because the American liberals want it," said another prominent Nicaraguan businessman in Miami who has worked closely with the FDN leadership.

UNO is sensitive to the charge that its leaders _ who advocate democracy for Nicaragua _ were hand-picked by the United States.

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Bosco Matamoros, who serves as a spokesman for both the FDN and UNO, conceded that there was no formal process for electing Calero, Robelo and Cruz to lead UNO. But he said the choice represented a "consensus" of Nicaraguan political figures living in exile and was an important step toward ending the divisiveness that has undermined the rebel movement.

"Our's is a democratic organization in which all Nicaraguans are invited to participate," Matamoros said.

Calero and Cruz did not agree to requests for interviews, and Robelo was out of the country and could not be reached.

In a September letter to the House Intelligence Committee, then-national security adviser Robert McFarlane acknowledged that the administration pressed for creation of a "political front involving credible non-military figures," an effort that led to the creation of UNO on the eve of last June's congressional debate on rebel aid.

The Contras claim a combined army of more than 20,000 men, but some U.S. officials put its actual fighting force much lower. The FDN's last major offensive occurred last summer when its troops were driven back by the Sandinista army, which for the first time used Soviet Mi-24 helicopter gunships.